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OLD TROJANS
IN NEW TROY



by Rev. Mihran T. Kalaidjian



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IT was in the early fifties that a retired clergyman in Troy, New York, put on the market, for the first time, collars detached from shirts. He did not realize that he was giving rise to a great modern industry. The manufacture of collars is today one of the major industries of the country. The evolution of the sewing machine, with its hundred and one varieties, has transformed a little home trade into a great world industry and has made Troy the center of the collar industry of the country. The city sends out annually twelve million dozen of collars and cuffs and one million shirts. There are more than twenty thousand people employed in this industry, and the annual pay roll reaches over \$10,000,000.

While the majority of the employees are women, there are departments where men are employed exclusively. Among many foreign elements that have been attracted to this city by its collar industry there is a considerable number of Armenians. During the last twenty-five years they have been colonizing in small numbers, but in the period 1909-1914 the Armenian population of Troy quadrupled, and the place became, with the exception of New York, the largest Armenian center in the state. In Troy and vicinity today there are more than fifteen hundred Armenians, most of whom are employed in the collar industry.

The Armenian colony in Troy differs most decidedly from those of other cities of the Eastern States in this respect: That while in other cities about seventy-five per cent are men and twenty-five per cent families, here, more than sixty per cent are families. The principal incentive these people



AN ARMENIAN BUTTONHOLE SHOP

have for making Troy their home is the opportunity afforded women and girls for remunerative employment. Thus they are able to help their husbands and parents support the family. Any one who calls at an Armenian home in Troy will find groups of women, neighbors and friends, busy with piles of collars, and at the same time enjoying a social time. A collar may seem a very simple thing, but it goes through countless hands from the time the cloth is cut until the finished product is packed in boxes, ready for shipment.

After the collar is cut the front interlinings and facings are attached by paste, lightly applied by hand. The plies are then stitched together. This work is all done by the home operatives, who are paid from four to seven cents per dozen, according to the style of the collar, out of which they must pay fifty cents a week to the expressman who delivers



THE GIRLS' FRIENDLY SOCIETY

the collars, irrespective of the number he may carry. The work is tedious and confining, but women of experience are able to earn from six to fifteen dollars a week, according to the style of the collar.

The Armenian men work in the factories, and are employed in several departments, but the majority of them have turned their attention to buttonholing, top turning, band turning, and shirt ironing. Buttonholing was the first department in which they were engaged, and many became experts. Some of the former buttonhole operators are now jobbers who own their own machines and a small shop, where they do work for the big factories by contract. But usually a buttonhole worker takes his machine with him to the factory, if he can afford one, or he hires it from the company for fifty cents a week. In some factories the employees must

also pay for the thread which they use—from two to two and a half dollars a week.

Many Armenians are also employed in the top and bands turning departments, where the work is all done by machinery. The front or the back of the top and the interlining are placed upon an electrically-heated bed and adjusted to gauges. The head of the machine contains a die which gives shape to the plies. By a cam and gear movement the head is brought down upon the plies over the die to the desired width. Great pressure had been exerted upon the head by compressed air, and since the bed plate is heated the plies are thus kept folded together. The bands are turned in the same way as the tops, except that while the tops are turned on three sides the bands are turned on all four. In the summer months, when the temperature is high, the work is rather depressing on account of the excessive heat. According to the style and quantity of work, the employees are able to earn from ten to twenty-five dollars and sometimes a little more.

The work in the collar factories is more pleasant than that in other factories. The surroundings are neat and sanitary. The Armenians have found the labor to their liking and in more than one way have proved to be very desirable workmen. They are quick to learn and are very industrious. They are sober and may always be depended upon to be at work on Monday mornings as well as on other days. Under proper leadership and instruction they are destined to make loyal and patriotic American citizens.

During recent years there has been marked improvement in the social and economic condition of these people. They have adapted themselves to their new environment with marked rapidity, their standard of living is always rising and



ARMENIAN CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, TROY, N. Y.

they have moved from the alleys and side streets, from shacks and old houses into the main streets. The Armenian quarters are in the most healthy part of the city, and probably sixty families have purchased homes in the last six years. Altogether it is a most hopeful and promising situation. The sense of ownership is an elevating and inspiring force with these people, and it encourages thrift and industry.

In the midst of the Armenian colony is the Armenian Calvary Congregational Church, a new and beautiful edifice, like a light set upon a hill. It is a great moral and spiritual force, touching the life of the people at many angles, saving lives and transforming a community. Its work has been carried on with the idea of training and transforming the Armenians of Troy into Christian American citizens. It is not a mission which is engaged merely in fitting men for the next world.

but an immigrant church carrying on all its activities with a view to meeting the actual, present, every-day needs of the people to whom it ministers. It has been the endeavor to make of this church a social and educational center for the Armenians in Troy, as well as a religious center. Its efforts may be described under three headings:

First: The religious work, which does not differ greatly from that of other churches except in a few essentials. The congregation is made up of people who have come from every part of the old Turkish Empire, and there are many dividing lines between. The most serious of these is the question of language. The members of our church who come from Armenian provinces speak Armenian as their mother tongue, while those who come from central and western Turkey, where they have been made to forget their native language, speak Turkish as their mother tongue, although in some degree each group understands the language of the other. It is therefore necessary to carry on the services of the church in three languages—a unique circumstance. One Sunday the morning service is held in the Turkish language and in the evening in Armenian, and the following Sunday the order is reversed. In the junior and primary departments of the Sunday School, English is used, while the senior department is conducted in both Armenian and Turkish.

The last four years of the great war have been for this people a time of sad experiences and severe trials. The Turkish atrocities and the knowledge of the heart-rending condition of those near and dear to them in Armenia have been the cause of great grief. The comforting and healing ministry of the Church of Christ has been a great blessing during this time of trial.



ARMENIAN HOMES ON "THE HILL"

Second: Educational Work. This work is most essential in any immigrant church. The people who are new to the country and its ways of thinking and living have to be initiated into the mysteries of American life. They are most eager to learn, provided the right method of approach is used. In this church this work has been done through several organizations, each one feeling its responsibility in this direction and taking pride in the success of the activities carried on under its auspices.

Through the Christian Endeavor Society weekly educational lectures and monthly socials have been given for the instruction and amusement of the young people, especially the young men who have no other opportunity for self-improvement and healthy recreation. The great events of American history and the biography of the great American leaders have

a special fascination for these people. Lectures on the lives of Washington, Lincoln, the American Revolution and the Civil War, often illustrated with stereopticon views, have drawn big crowds.

Realizing the importance of the mother's position and influence in the home, a Mothers' Club was organized. The weekly meetings of this club have been a factor in the elevating and improving of home life and in raising the standards of living. The pastor has been in the habit of giving a series of talks on the problems of housing, sanitation, health and hygiene, as well as on American habits and ways of living, which have been much appreciated.

The Girls' Friendly Society has been in charge of the pastor's wife and has been a great success, both educationally and socially. It has successfully maintained an English study class for young women. Few people realize that the most serious aspect of the immigration problem is the one relating to the children of the immigrants. How often may these little ones be heard saying, "Mother, you don't know English; you don't know anything." It is imperative that a special effort be made to teach English to the women of our immigrant churches.

The Junior League, composed of boys and girls, which meets every Sunday, receives instruction designed to make them good Christians and better Americans.

Third: Social Service. The work which brings the church into closest touch with the people, and wins their affection, confidence and gratitude, has been that rendered along lines of social service. It is not difficult to imagine how recent immigrants, with little knowledge of the language and customs of the new country, will appeal for help to the one institution

which they believe will give them honest service. An American clergyman once remarked, "It may be that the pastor of an ordinary American church should be considered by the people as a luxury, but the pastor of an immigrant church is an absolute necessity to the people." It is true that such a pastor must be everything to his people. They come to him for advice and help in every conceivable thing, and he is called upon to do a hundred and one things that an American congregation would not even dream of asking of its pastor. He must serve as an employment bureau, as a legal adviser, as an accident adjuster, a charity dispenser, a real estate agent, and interpreter, and last, but not least, as a matrimonial agency.

It is a grave mistake to think that Americanization is merely a matter of language and not of ideas and ideals. Many immigrants have opportunities to learn English outside the church, but it is only in the church that they can receive the training that will make them good citizens. The Protestant churches of America are facing a great opportunity and responsibility. The time has come when the Christian patriots of this country should realize the indispensable and vital character of the work of the immigrant church and support it on a larger scale.

THE CONGREGATIONAL HOME MISSIONARY SOCIETY
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